THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. II. February 5, 1937 Shebat 24, 5697 No. 20

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Vols. I. and II.

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EDITORIALS

The Community in the Making

IN our last issue of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST, we published an article by Rabbi Armond E. Cohen on the Cleveland Community Council. We were very happy to do so in order that our readers might have some idea of the progress of the community idea in American Jewish life. From the description given by Rabbi Cohen, the observer of current Jewish developments will undoubtedly realize that Cleveland Jewry is far from constituting the ideal community. Some notable achievements can be pointed to, but, obviously, the Community Council in that city has a long way to go before it can measure up to the standards set for this type of organization by those who are striving for a radical transformation of Jewish life.

Nevertheless, we feel that it is altogether out of place for Jews in certain quarters to condemn the entire project. Some weeks ago, the Congress Bulletin, the official organ of the American Jewish Congress, carried a number of articles written by leaders of the Community Council in Cleveland attacking and defending the experiment there. In view of the sharp criticism which the Community has had to face, we consider it important to point out that the effort to organize Jewish Communities is a new one. There are no tried and tested techniques. Those who would reconstruct Jewish life in America must have the patience to proceed with caution, to probe carefully; they must be prepared even to err, be willing to rectify mistakes, and be energetic enough to try to improve upon methods that have been tried and found wanting.

Nothing will be achieved if the faint-hearted seize upon the first error in method or action and use it as a weapon with which to destroy confidence in the possibility of reconstructing Jewish life. Particularly is this true in community organization. There are no experts in this work. Even the recognized leaders of Jewish communities are novices in this type of communal enterprise. Democratic community organization is the result of an evolutionary process. American Jewry is entering upon a new stage, and must be prepared to go through a transition period during which the shortcomings of the outgrown stage will linger on.

One of the moot problems is the relation of Federation to the Community Council. Rabbi Cohen readily concedes

that Federation has not yet been supplanted by the Community Council as the "undisputed authoritative governing body of the Jewish community," but it is hoped that "in the course of time, Federation will come under the direction of the Community Council." One cannot be too impatient about such changes. It is natural in the early days of the Community that those persons of means who are the large contributors to Jewish philanthropy should also be those who determine policy for the Jewish community. This is a vestige of a long established system. But it is inevitable that as the base of support broadens the control of the Community funds should pass from the hands of the larger contributors to the more representative governing body.

Another alleged failure of the Council is its silence about international Jewish issues and affairs. Those who make this criticism must understand the distinction between the Community Council as a method of organization and the calibre of such a body as determined by its personnel. A Council may be inarticulate when it should be vocal, due to the fact that those who constitute its membership may at one time or another fail to take cognizance of vital Jewish issues. Reduced to its simplest terms, this is a charge against the intelligence or the alertness of the members of the Council. It must not be construed as a criticism against the form or method of Jewish organization that the Community Council represents. There is nothing inherently lacking in the mechanics of its organization that can be related to its alleged failure to speak out when it should have done so. This distinction should be made in weighing all criticism. Only then shall we be able to discover genuine errors.

We are inclined to agree with Rabbi Cohen's conclusion, that "even a year in an organized Jewish community gives one the satisfaction of sensing the vast possibilities inherent in this type of community organization in America."

Zionist Education

RECENT developments give a more hopeful aspect to organized Zionist endeavor in this country. Official Zionist agencies have begun to manifest renewed interest in the educational implications of their responsibilities. The Laborite faction has continuously and consistently carried on an educational program, which includes special elementary and advanced Jewish schools of their own, as well as all manner of youth activities, including *haksharah* camps to prepare settlers and workers for Palestine. The Mizrahi group has steadfastly proclaimed its religious program, and has organized a youth following from which it draws many of its workers as well as its contingent of Palestine *haluzim*. Hadassah has an enviable record of Palestinian service, and its Junior division is a challenge to all Jewish youth effort in this country. Yet, it is only at its last convention that Hadassah adopted a resolution to institute a planned educational project as an integral part of its organizational activity. The Jewish National Fund has opened a vigorous youth department and is launching an intensive educational campaign. And finally, the Zionist Organization of America, in accordance with recommendations made by its Commission on Education and Youth organizations, has, at long last, reestablished a Department of Education, has appointed an outstanding Jewish educator as its director, and has also agreed to subsidize such organizations as Young Judea, Avukah and Masada.

American preoccupation with the practical problems involved in the building of the Jewish Homeland, since the granting of the Mandate in 1922, has almost precluded interest in the intellectual and regenerative influences of the Zionist movement. Hitlerism has helped to accentuate the purely philanthropic and "heart appeal" values of the Palestine undertaking for the benefit of the refugees from political and religious persecution. Zionism as a Jewish outlook on life for the indivi-

dual or the group, or as a challenge to the intellect and idealism of Jewish youth in the diaspora seemed neglected, if not altogether forgotten. Completely satisfied that old questions about the compatibility of Zionism and Americanism, Homeland and *galut* have found their solution in passing events, Zionist leadership in America seemed to take the philosophic aspects of the Palestine project for granted. It had begun to appear as though the sole test of the value of a Zionist activity was its fund raising potentialities.

The demand for Zionist education comes from those sincere Jews who are concerned by the fact that thousands of our people are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the challenge of rival causes. They realize the dire need for Zionist literature which will fortify their allegiance to the rebuilding of the Jewish Homeland. The knowledge they seek must be supplied. If it is, the reconstruction of Jewish life in the diaspora will be enormously facilitated, for it is the informed Zionist who will necessarily become interested in Jewish educational activity for himself and for his children. It is the intelligent Zionist who will serve as the exponent of the *kehillah* idea and the democratic ideal in Jewish life. It is the enlightened Zionist who is more likely to respond to the modern demands of a program for social justice both in Palestine and in the diaspora.

A program of Zionist education is essentially a program of Zionist study, discussion and activity, for adults and for youth. It implies an influence over and cooperation with all educational agencies for the attainment of Zionist objectives. These must become clearer, more comprehensive and more profound. Hitlerism and communism are challenging Zionist ideology, Zionist activity, Jewish survival. Organized Zionist endeavor must meet this challenge on the higher levels of intellect and emotion. Zionism must assume its role as a constructive, regenerative, spiritual influence in the diaspora as well as in Palestine.

Unwholesome Debate

THE National Council of Jewish Women has added to its list of publications a booklet entitled, "Proposed Roads for American Jewry." It contains edited addresses by Marvin Lowenthal, Professor Morris Raphael Cohen and Professor Gutkind. We have always contended that the renewal of Jewish life is inconceivable without new and ever new Jewish content, and, for that reason, we should be expected to hail the appearance of even so slight a contribution to American-Jewish letters as the National Council's recent booklet.

Yet we cannot in all conscience welcome the publication of this symposium, for it constitutes merely another addition to that unwholesome and fruitless literature of morbid introspection which seems to enthrall American Jews. Surely no mental hygienist would agree that a man is altogether healthy minded, if he devotes all his thoughts to the contemplation of suicide. Yet that is exactly what this kind of "Jewish content" is: a perpetual debate on the question of whether the Jewish people shall go on living or whether it shall plan some form or other of mass self-annihilation. We do not wish to place all the contributors to the booklet in question in this category of Jewish-suicidists; nor do we for a moment venture to assert that Jews who are so minded should be (if they could be) compelled to keep their opinions to themselves.

But we do believe that it is high time that Jewish organizations, committed to the advancement of Jewish life, put an end to these interminable discussions under their auspices. Let those who hold negative attitudes toward Jewish life set up their own forums and indulge to their hearts' content in the elaboration of their theories. But let Jewish organizations proceed to reconstruct Jewish life.

Some weeks ago we commented upon a debate that was held in Washington between Rabbi Isaac Landman and Benjamin Stolberg, under the auspices of one

of the local synagogues. In that editorial we attempted to indicate the futility of countering assimilationism with Jewish creedalism. We should like to revert to that debate at this time as another case in point. By what standards of pedagogy, by the principles of what Jewish philosophy, in the name of what ultimate good can it be demonstrated that a synagogue accomplishes anything beneficial to Jewish life or even to its own constituents by staging such a debate? Was it honestly conceived that Rabbi Landman would make any impression upon Mr. Stolberg in the course of an hour's debate? Was it perhaps imagined that Rabbi Landman might have been convinced of Mr. Stolberg's position and abandoned the rabbinate? Are the leaders of the synagogue really communists, and is this their subtle way of boring from within?

Obviously, the debate was arranged for one and only one purpose: the synagogue wishes to draw people into its auditorium. Nothing succeeds in this respect like a sensational debate, and no debate is as sensational as one which features a radical. We are not seeking to censure this particular synagogue or that; the same evil prevails throughout the land.

This kind of written and oral "Torah" will continue to characterize American Jewish life so long as individual synagogues continue their individualistic lives, competing against "rival" synagogues and striving to bring the customers in. It will continue, furthermore, so long as American Jewry remains helpless for lack of a positive philosophy and an integrated program of Jewish life for our time. When a man organizes his life, sets up clear objectives, finds purpose and direction in his existence, thoughts of suicide fade away. American Jews too will cease this collective soliloquy, a la Hamlet, when they finally think through the question of what it means to be a Jew, and act upon a satisfying and creative answer.

THIS ISSUE CONTAINS

An Index to the First Two Volumes of

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The Problem of Yiddishism

By Abraham G. Duker

HISTORICALLY speaking, the problem of the Yiddish language and its survival is merely a phase of the larger aspect of the Jewish language problem. The Jews have, during their long career of migrations, utilized a number of different languages. Some of them were elevated to the dignity of a second sacred language. Others maintained their hold for centuries as the spoken language of the Jews in addition to that of the country in which Jews lived.

The Yiddish language which is a thirteenth to fifteenth century outgrowth of Middle High German, is considered by some Jews as a second sacred language, and it is also the spoken language of a majority, though a constantly declining one, of the Jewish people. Naturally, there are many attitudes and differences of opinion concerning both its present value and its future position in the life of the Jewish people. I shall classify these attitudes beginning with that which regards Yiddish as a religious language.

The Yiddish language is the second sacred language among orthodox Jews living in whatever remains now of the East European continuation of the medieval cultural ghetto. Among these Jews, the Yiddish language serves as a distinguishing characteristic of the separation of the Jews from other nationalities and religions, and as such it has become holy, sometimes regarded as being as sacred as many important religious customs and practices. For instance, the Jews of the *Meah Shearim* section of Jerusalem refuse to speak Hebrew because it is a sacred language. They speak Yiddish but, nevertheless, they will not acquire any other spoken language for their daily use among Jews. The same situation can be seen clearly in Poland and in other East European centers where the use of any other language but Yiddish for daily conversation among Jews is frowned upon severely, and in fact, considered a sin. This could hardly be interpreted as a nationalistic attitude unless we choose to interpret every Jewish religious custom as essentially nationalistic.

It is erroneous to assume that Orthodoxy is tied up with Yiddish. Neither the Frankfort type of Orthodoxy, which utilizes German, nor the American Neo-Orthodoxy which utilizes English, has any need of a linguistic differentiation, and for this reason the use of Yiddish has been dropped completely. The same trend can be seen in the modern orthodox synagogues in America which maintain rabbis who can preach in both languages, Yiddish and English, with English continually replacing the Yiddish language.

In general, as Orthodoxy becomes more progressive and advances either in the direction of westernization or of increased national consciousness, it tends to drop the Yiddish language. A clear example can be seen in the case of the German *Agudah* which dispensed with Yiddish entirely and which caused at least the girls' schools (*Beis Ya'akov*) of its Polish counterpart to adopt the Hebrew language in a large measure.

Even more clearly is this the trend within the *Mizrahi.* This Zionist political party uses the Yiddish language extensively, and yet it is continually replacing Yiddish with Hebrew in its school system, and is eliminating the use of Yiddish in Palestine without any inner struggle.

Of more importance is the secular aspect of Yiddishism. Modern Yiddish literature, which was begun by the leaders of the Haskalah in order to bring cul-

ture into the East European ghetto (in some cases assimilation plus culture) developed during the nineteenth century both with the aid of the Zionist and the Jewish Labor Movements into a factor for national consciousness in Jewish life. The progressive secularization of Jewish life in East European lands during the last decades of the nineteetnh century and during the beginning of the twentieth century, the total refusal of East European Orthodoxy to adopt a form more palatable to the westernized Jew, and the sentimental attachment of a large number of intelligentzia to the "folk" elements in Judaism brought about the recognition of the Jewish language as the sole Jewish differentia.

The Czernowitz Conference of 1908, which concerned itself largely with establishing Yiddish as a language instead of a jargon, paid attention to this problem. Some, like Peretz, believed that Yiddish should be merely a folk language. Some, like Birnbaum and Zhitlowsky, upheld Yiddish as *the* only national language of the Jewish people. Others, more conciliatory and Zionistically inclined, upheld the Yiddish language as *a* national language, or to be more exast, one of the two national languages of the Jews, Hebrew and Yiddish.

This Conference awakened the hitherto slumbering and inarticulate to the problem of languages and brought about, as an after-effect, long debates concerning the status of both languages. The debates have continued to this day. But definite action has been taken nevertheless. In Palestine, the Hebrew language was introduced as the sole Jewish language; in Russia Hebrew was entirely cast out, including its spelling in, and a large share of its contributions to, the Yiddish language; in Poland and America various syntheses of both solutions have been worked out in practice.

The Mono-Yiddishist solution began with an enthusiastic acceptance on the part of bourgeois intelligentzia, with a tacit acceptance on the part of the labor parties as merely a means in the class struggle, and ended with the acceptance of this language by the latter as the sole criterion of Jewishness. The Bund, for instance, began with utilization of Yiddish merely as a language of propaganda, and very soon ended with the insistence upon the retention of Yiddish as the only cultural expression of the Jewish masses, to be supported and enforced by cultural autonomy rights. The Folkists had no hidden motives such as "weapons in the class struggle." They accepted the Yiddish language as the only Jewish factor *per se;* but they did not disregard the historical elements of either the Jewish religion and its folk aspects, or of the Hebrew language in its more national aspects. Some of them were even willing to retain the Hebrew language as an additional intelligentzia language.

The situation with the communists was quite different. The Socialist Democratic Party of Russia refused to accept the principle of cultural autonomy for the Jewish masses through the Yiddish language as part of its program, and continually fought about this with the Bundists. Due to the assimilationist attitude of many of its leaders who were influenced by both Marx and the Austrian school of nationalism, they refused to recognize the Jewish people as a nation. Competition with the Bund caused them to publish at rare times some propaganda material in Yiddish. The same policy was adopted by the Bolsheviks. It is characteristic that at no time previous to the revolution did Lenin, Stalin or the other outstanding theoreticians among the Bolsheviks evince any desire to grant cultural autonomy to the Jewish masses, or to recognize any of the national aspects of the Jewish people, even in the proletarian sense.

A pragmatic solution was adopted (reluctantly, to be sure) after the revolution when Russia found herself faced by the problem of national minorities and was

solving it on a nationalistic basis for all minorities. The Jews could not be left out. But leading Jewish communists time and again reiterated that the Yiddish language was to be utilized only as a weapon in the class struggle among the Jewish masses. Even Dimanstein, the head of the Yersektsia, declared that he would not mind if the Jewish workers were to drop the Yiddish language entirely and adopt Russian instead. All efforts to recognize any other elements besides the Yiddish language as factors in Jewish nationalism were frowned upon. It seems to be clear that the Jewish masses in Russia did not take very kindly to this extremist interpretation of Yiddish. As late as 1933, an official report in the Ukraine stated "that very often there is an organized opposition of the parents to the Yiddish schools" and for this reason enforced Yiddishization should be opposed.

Communists in America have also continued the development of Yiddish as a weapon of class struggle. It is too early to make any generalizations as to whether the newly adopted tactics which caused a change in the relationship of the communists to general problems of Jewish life, will also be followed by changes in their linguistic attitude. Their schools can be called the communist counterpart of the Workmen's Circle school. It is characteristic that the communists claim to have a pragmatic approach, rather than a theoretical one, to the problem of languages among the Jews. As a result of this, they utilize the Hebrew language fully in Palestine, and permit full freedom of assimilation to the Jews in the Soviet Union. They object to Yiddishism as a movement, since they consider it as a nationalist, bourgeois and class collaborationist trend. This attitude is largely a continuation of the struggle between the Bund and the Russian Social Democrats and Bolsheviks on the question of cultural autonomy. In the period of the "Social Fascist" theory it was termed, *Der fashizirter Yiddishism.* With the change in the line of the Comintern in 1935, the relations between the Mono-Yiddishists and the Yiddish speaking communists have become less strained, and "United Front" attemtps on the "cultural front" have been carried out successfully on several occasions.

Since the accepted Bolshevik Marxist definition of a nationality insists upon the retention of land as a major factor, and also because of other reasons, the idea of territorial concentration of the Jewish masses with Yiddish as its recognized national language has been accepted by the communist theoreticians and leaders. It is really essentially an inverted diaspora negatory Zionism in the sense that it accepts the linguistic assimilation of all the Jews except those who reside in this particular territorial center or autonomous region.

The situation in America parallels closely that of the other countries. Orthodoxy is dropping the Yiddish language. On the other hand, the retention of Yiddish as a language of conversation in many orthodox schools today in America can be considered rather an emotional response to tradition than a thought out and integrated philosophy of action. The abortive attempt to return to Yiddish on the part of the *Young Israel* can be considered in the same light. There is also a group of devotees to whom Yiddish has become a *lashon kodesh,* to be taught and cultivated as a relic of the past, without any use of it as a living language.

The Zionists have dropped Yiddish entirely, except for educational propaganda purposes. A different solution was accepted by a large part of the Labor Zionist groups. The Poale Zion officially recognizes the Yiddish language as the national language of the Jews in the diaspora, and the Hebrew language as that of the Jews in Palestine, and allows and encourages cultural contacts between both. The left Poale Zion accepted Yiddish in the beginning, as the only Jewish national

language. The reality of Hebrew in Palestine, however, has influenced their acceptance of Hebrew as one of the national languages of the Jews in Palestine, and their insistence upon giving Yiddish the right of a minority language among the Jews in Palestine.

The *Jewish Socialist Verband, Workmen's Circle,* and allied organizations have largely retained their Bundist ideology in utilizing the Yiddish language as a weapon in the class struggle; they have also recognized its emotional force in parent-child relationship and Americanization, without, however, developing a clear nationalist ideology or attitude concerning the Yiddish language. More articultae in this respect are the independent schools and groups which are concentrated about the *Yiddish Culture Society* and the *Sholem Aleichem* schools. Ideologically, these are independent left wing socialist groups with strong sympathies for the Soviet Union; the position of Yiddish in that country is in large measure responsible for their attitude. In addition, they manage to attract some of the "folkish" bourgeois adherents. They accept Yiddish as the only criterion of Jewish nationalism, but they take due cognizance of some elements of folk religion, which they call "Lebensteiger.' They can be considered as *the* ultra Yiddishists since their tie to the language does not depend on either territorial concentration or class struggle allegiance, and is not used as a means to any end as in the case of most other parties and wings. This wing has been most articulate in both its activities and theoretical development. It conceives the Jewish people as occupying some kind of "Yiddish Land" to be found wherever Jews reside, and looks upon non-Yiddish speaking Jews as material for linguistic conversion on a large scale.

The split between the Mono-Yiddishists and the Zionist Yiddishists seems to be unavoidable because the Left Wing, anti-Zionist, anti-Hebraist leadership of the Mono-Yiddishist movement is gaining strength through its approaching unity with the communists on a platform calling for Yiddish, for Biro-Bidjan, and secularism, and is violently opposed to Hebrew, Zionism, settlement in Palestine and religion of the supernatural or even the "folk" variety. The Left Poale Zion will probably join this coalition in the diaspora. Developments in the world, if we disregard the possibility of the disappearance of Yiddish altogether seems to point to a split in the Jewish people on a linguistic and traditional basis in a manner very similar to the Karaite schism of the eighth century, in which social, economic and intellectual differences found their expression in the only form possible during that period, namely the religious one.

Religious Intuition vs. Metaphysical Rationalism

By Eugene Kohn

LAST year's celebration of the octocentennary of Maimonides' birth has had the merit of stimulating the philosophic thinking of Jews about themes that have dominated the Jewish spiritual tradition. The attempt to analyze the contribution of Maimonides to philosophic thought involves the question, to what extent Maimonides is indebted to Jewish tradition and to what extent he draws from Greek philosophy for his fundamental concepts. This, in turn, leads to a comparison of the two approaches to the nature of reality, the Jewish and the Hellenic.

In *The Jew and the Universe** Solomon Goldman maintains that, although

*The Jew and the Universe, by Solomon Goldman. Harper and Brothers, New York and London, 1936.

Maimonides' method was unquestionably influenced profoundly by Aristotelian logic, the content of his thought is derived wholly from Jewish tradition. "Throughout, the differences between Maimonides and historic Judaism are only on the surface. The rationalism and skepticism ascribed to him, by foes and admirers alike, have their decided limitation. . . . His training in science and philosophy was naturally bound to provide him with a vocabulary and method unwelcome to the rabbis." Notwithstanding the acumen and scholarly documentation of Dr. Goldman's argument, the question nevertheless obtrudes: Is it possible to cast one's thought in a Hellenic vocabulary and method without effect on its content? Words are not merely vehicles of thought but instruments and, indeed, the very material and substance of thought. If the vocabulary and method of Maimonides' thinking were unwelcome to the rabbis, the rabbis were probably justified from their traditional viewpoint, in regarding them with suspicion.

But it is the larger aspects of Dr. Goldman's book that mainly interest us, his justification of the intuitive religious approach of Jewish tradition to the ultimate problems with which philosophy deals as against the rationalistic dialectic which is the contribution of the Greeks. He offers a valid and powerful apologetic—if so passionate an affirmation of the spiritual values inherent in a tradition can be called "apologetic"—for the beliefs that underlie the traditional Jewish reaction to life. His ironic exposure of the inadequacies of the "logic-chopping" (to use Carlysle's incisive expression) that characterizes so much of western metaphysical thought is of a piece with the ironic arguments of the Prophets in their denunciation of prevailing idolatries. In view of the tendency of so many Jews today to despise their own tradition because it has not come down to them clothed in the familiar garb of western philosophic thought, such a spirited defense and counter-attack has a definite value.

But if the purpose of the author is to help us to a solution of the agonizing problems that life poses to us today, he is, so to speak, barking up the wrong tree. The question is not whether an intuitive or a rational approach to reality brings us nearer to ultimate truth. Both reason and what the author calls intuition, for the term is not altogether a happy one and lacks definition, are essential characteristics of human nature. Each has its function and neither can be dispensed with. There are human experiences which are incommunicable in terms of abstract generalizations, but which, nevertheless great personalities succeed in expressing without recourse to elaborate analysis by evoking in others a similar ideational, emotional and volitional reaction. They thus give us insights or intuitions of the nature of reality that are frequently of inestimable value in our adjustment to the universe.

But there are also communicable experiences. Language would be impossible if human experiences could not be represented by common verbal symbols. By the use of verbal symbols, whole tracts and areas of experience can be represented by a single abstract term. Such terms are the refined tools of our mental processes and offer the same advantages and disadvantages over the cruder symbols of concrete objects for these mental processes that modern machinery offers over handwork for mechanical processes. Dr. Goldman himself recognizes the indispensable character of the rational as well as the intuitive method. He sees a justification for Maimonides' availing himself of Greek logic in order to defend the intuitive insights of traditional Judaism. He also, in one of the most interesting passages of the book, calls attention to the dependence of Aristotle himself on traditional Hellenic beliefs which he accepted intuitively without question.

The difference between the intuitionist

and rationalist approach to reality is analogous to the different ways in which an artist and a chartographer view a landscape. The one gives us a picture, the other a map. There is much of beauty and meaning in the artist's picture, which is omitted from the chartographer's map; but, if we are about to set out on a journey, the map will prove the more helpful for purposes of orientation. Dr. Goldman's book has the unfortunate tendency of posing an unreal dilemma, of asking us to choose between intuitionism and rationalism when what we need to know is which method is more appropriate to a particular situation.

For this must be clear: the possession of ultimate truth about the nature of the universe eludes us by either method. Each has its pitfalls. The great Prophets were intuitionists, but so also were the "false prophets" whom they denounced, and the most logical system of thought can lead to the most erroneous conclusions by reason of omitting a single relevant fact from its premises. Ideas are to be judged by their fruits rather than by their roots.

It is to be hoped that Dr. Goldman's latest book is not his last book in the field of Jewish philosophy. Having given us such a vigorous defense of the intuitive approach to reality, we should welcome additional books from him that would apply rather than defend the intuitive method. We are curious to know what are Dr. Goldman's intuitions on some of the issues that dominate the consciousness of modern men. What are his intuitions with regard to the economic insecurity and fear of poverty that have influenced so many to abandon the intuitive assumptions of traditional religion and to take up atheism? Can we abolish poverty? Can we cure the evils arising from poverty without abolishing poverty? What merit, if any, attaches to the various programs of social and economic reconstruction? Confronted by a new and challenging situation, can we Jews depend on the insights of our fathers as embodied in Jewish tradition to guide us? If not, how can we court intuitive insights that shall avail us? By what criteria are we to distinguish between the extra-rational and the irrational or mad? Has chauvinistic, militaristic patriotism, which for many people expresses their intuition of the essential nature of human society, the same validity as the ideal of a universal human brotherhood, which is also accepted on the basis of intuition? If not, by what criteria, rational or intuitive, are their relative claims to be evaluated?

In challenging Dr. Goldman to produce another book which shall answer some of the questions that the reading of his latest work raises in our minds, it is by no means our intention to disparage the present work. It is precisely because the book shows such thorough scholarship, intense emotion and lucid utterance that we would welcome its author's further pursuit of the ideas here expressed. That it raises more questions than it answers is a quality rather than a defect. Perhaps Dr. Goldman's next book will give us new and valuable insights into the needs and opportunities of contemporary life such as have escaped the cold and sterile logic of unimaginative rationalists.

The Life and Times of Akiba

By Ben Zion Bokser

ANY friend of Jewish letters will welcome Dr. Finkelstein's new biography* of the martyred Talmudist, Akiba ben Joseph. As a character study it is vivid and moving and succeeds in recreating not only the career of the great teacher but the entire period in which he played so dominant a role. Many personalities of heroic proportions helped to build the traditional Jewish civilization, but unfortunately, we know very little about them. Perhaps the foremost among them was Akiba, and in having drawn this lucid portrait of him, Dr. Finkelstein has made an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of the Jewish past.

It is, however, the Jewish liberal who has particular cause to rejoice. In the face of a vigorous opposition, the Jewish liberal has held that Judaism is not a set of propositions concerning the nature of things, but the evolving civilization of the Jewish people. Jewish tradition, he has maintained, is, like all other traditions, only the framework within which certain ideas and ideals, certain life patterns mature and have their being, but the life pattern itself is capable of unlimited adjustment to new knowledge or changed social needs. The present volume, in a sense, vindicates this position. The Judaism which Akiba transmitted to posterity was not the same as that which he had inherited from his social milieu. It was more rational, more democratic, more humane, imbued with a deeper concern for the individual in contradistinction to the groups of which he was a part; and these changes were not the inevitable workings of some automatic process of "evolution." They were molded by the intelligent hands of Akiba and his disciples in the same manner as such changes are molded today—through reason, suasion, and struggle.

The dialectic by which Akiba reconciled his interest in social and religious change with loyalty to tradition was determined by the basic assumptions with which the intellectuals of the day operated. The most important of these was the finality of Scripture. Revolutionary and far-reaching as Akiba's views were, they had to be harmonized with the more primitive opinions of the basic Scriptural text. To accomplish this it was often necessary to deviate from the plain meanings of the text, to attach special importance to seemingly superfluous letters, in defiance very often of all rules of rhetoric nad grammar. The casual student is at times repelled by Akiba's artificial interpretations of the Bible, but these interpretations are the tools through which he read his progressive doctrines into Scripture and gave them the sanctions of tradition.

The dialectic of Akiba will, of course, be a useless instrument for the Jewish liberal of today. Scripture to him is not a final authority, but only one of the many achievements of the Jewish civilization in evolution. As new knowledge and new social needs arise, old institutions and opinions have to be reconstructed, for the Jewish liberal of today believes in progress, in development. Continuity with the past is achieved for him through the essential identity of the people who created these institutions yesterday and make them anew today, and through the fact that both the process of creation as well as the process of re-creation are motivated by the same impulse—the effort to make the Jewish institutions into serviceable tools that shall help the Jew in his quest for the good life.

For his source material Dr. Finkelstein used principally the references to Akiba in Rabbinic literature. The scholar in Rabbinics may, in individual instances, differ with Dr. Finkelstein in his interpretation of a text or the implications that he sees in it. But the portrait that he has drawn will remain essentially valid, and is an important contribution to American Jewish letters.

*Akiba: Scholar, Saint, and Martyr, Covici-Friede, 1936.

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